



## **A Helping Hand by LizzySong**

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**Summary:** A begrudging Hopper helps an injured Steve when theres no one else around. (Joyce and the kids will be in later chapters as well)

## 1. Basketball Practice

**Author's Note:** I got a request on my tumblr to write something where Billy injures Steve at school and Steve has to call Hopper for help, so here it is! I'll post the next chapter as soon as it's finished.

**Hope you enjoy!**

Ever since that night three months ago, every interaction Steve Harrington had with Billy Hargrove was hell -- especially during basketball practices.

Granted, their interactions had never been pleasant, but lately they'd been getting worse.

So far Steve had suffered several hard shoves in the hallway, a myriad of certainly illegal pushes in basketball, and even a couple punches. He was also sure that at one point Billy had tried to run him down in the school parking lot, but he couldn't prove it.

The only reason he didn't fight back was because, according to Max, Billy wasn't treating her as badly as he used to. Max had no reason to lie to Steve, she didn't even know that Billy had been torturing him at school every day, so he believed her. That meant that Billy was taking out the majority of his anger on Steve instead of her, and that was something that he could live with.

This was a particularly difficult day for Steve, and he suspected it was because he and Max had run into Billy while he was dropping her off at school -- acting like the big brother that Billy should've been.

After the "Night of the Demodogs" as Steve, Max, Lucas, and Dustin referred to it, Steve had started driving Max to and from school so she could have more time away from her asshole of a stepbrother.

During basketball practice today Billy had already rammed into Steve twice, though Steve had managed to stay upright both times.

The third time, however, was more of a visibly deliberate push, as

opposed to something that could be explained away as an accidental run-in, and Steve wasn't prepared for it.

He fell, hard, feeling his leg twist and hearing a popping noise as the side of his knee made contact with the floor. He laid there for a few moments, stunned and in pain, when he heard a loud, sharp whistle and the other students around him stop running.

"Harrington!" the coach came over to where the teenager was still lying on the ground, and Steve slowly sat up, wincing in pain as he tried to move his leg.

The coach knelt down next to him and inspected the boy's leg, having seen the way he'd fallen.

After a couple minutes of this, the man kneeling next to Steve nodded slightly as if confirming something and looked at the teen. "Looks like a sprain to me, but you should get it looked at," he said, helping the student stand up, "Go to the office and call your parents. Take the rest of the day and rest up, alright?"

Steve sighed but then nodded, knowing that there was no way he'd be able to continue playing with his leg in this shape, "Yeah, okay."

"Good. Can you make it on your own?"

"Yeah, I'll be fine," Steve said, as he attempted to start walking. The moment he put weight on his his leg, however, he felt his knee buckle painfully; and he would've fallen if it weren't for his coach grabbing his arm and pulling him back upright.

"Okay... Williams," the man said, looking at one of Steve's teammates, "Get Harrington to the office."

On the way out of the gym, Steve, and the boy helping him, passed Billy, who whispered, "How many times I gotta tell you to plant your feet, Harrington?" with a smirk. Steve just glared at him for a moment before continuing on.

Sitting in the school office, he was unsure of who to call for help. His parents were out of town... again, and he sure as hell wasn't going to ask Nancy to take him to the hospital.

After a minute of pondering this, he sighed and dialed a number.

"Hawkins Police," a woman's voice answered on the other end of the line.

"Is Hopper there?"

"...Joyce?"

"Wha-- No, this is Steve Harrington. Is Hopper there? I need to talk to him."

"Hold please."

Steve had to wait only half-a-minute before a gruff voice spoke on the other end of the line, "Harrington--"

--The kids are fine, don't worry."

"Then why--"

--I... need a ride."

"...You what?"

"To the hospital. I need a ride to the hospital. ...Can you come pick me up? ...I wouldn't ask, but there's nobody else who can take me."

There was sigh from the policeman, and then, "Where are you?"

"The high school."

"I'll be there in ten."

"Thank--" Steve started, but Hopper had already hung up.

## 2. The Hospital

It wasn't long before Hopper walked through the office doors and over to the somewhat miserable looking boy sitting in an uncomfortable chair, who was still wearing his sweat stained t-shirt and basketball shorts, having not had the chance to change out of his gym clothes.

"Alright, kid," the police chief said, "Let's go." Steve nodded and slowly stood up, once again feeling his knee buckle under his weight the moment he tried to stand on it.

Hopper steadied him and then wrapped an arm around the teenager, helping him limp out of the school.

They sat in silence for some time during the long drive to the hospital before Hopper finally spoke.

"So what happened?" he asked, looking at Steve for a moment before returning his eyes to the road.

"...Billy Hargrove," the teen said with disdain.

"Hargrove... Isn't that the kid that--"

"--Gave me a beating for taking care of kids? Yeah, that's the guy."

Hopper nodded slightly, not speaking again, but clearly thinking about something.

Steve rested his head against the window and sighed, feeling his knee starting to throb badly.

Eventually Hopper pulled into the hospital parking lot and helped Steve into the ER wing of the building.

Steve noticed the man's expression change from rather indifferent to one of anxiety, and wondered why. He wouldn't have expected Hawkins Police Chief Jim Hopper to be afraid of hospitals.

The older man helped the teenager get to a waiting room chair, then

went to check him in, hating every moment. He hadn't stepped inside the hospital since he'd lost Sarah. Now he was in the same ER waiting room -- with Steve Harrington of all people.

He couldn't leave the kid alone at school with that injury, though, no matter how much he hated being in this place again. The Harrington boy had proven himself good at taking care of all those kids -- including Eleven and Joyce's boy -- and El trusted and liked him. So he owed the teenager, even though he didn't want to admit it.

They sat in silence in the waiting room for maybe twenty minutes before Steve's name was called. Hopper hesitated for a second, not wanting to go through the exam rooms, but then stood up and helped the boy walk again.

Once they were in a room and the nurse had finished taking Steve's vitals -- which Jim refused to watch -- they were left alone again.

"...You don't have to stay," Steve said after a minute, and Hopper looked at him. "And how do you plan on getting back home?" Jim asked.

The teenager shrugged, "I'll figure it out."

"No you won't. You're gonna sit outside for an hour before calling me to come pick you up. And I don't want to drive that much."

"...You sure?"

"You trying to get rid of me, kid?" There was a slight tone of amusement in the man's voice.

"No. You just seem... uncomfortable."

"I'm fine."

They sat quietly again for a few minutes before Steve suddenly exclaimed, "Shit!"

"What's wrong?" Hopper asked worriedly, thinking this was a cry of pain from the teen.

"I'm supposed to pick Max up from school," said Steve with a groan, flopping back onto the exam table he was sitting on. "I can't let that asshole pick her up..." this he said more to himself than Hopper, as he was trying to think of any way he could make sure that Max didn't have to go home with Billy.

Normally if Steve couldn't pick her up, then she'd just ride home with Lucas on his bike; but it was February and there was too much snow and ice for the kids to bike.

"Hey," Hopper said, startling Steve out of his train of thought, "It's okay, kid. I'll call Joyce and tell her she needs to get Max when she picks up Will."

Steve sat up a little to look at the police chief, "Really? You think she'll be okay with that?"

"I think that if I didn't tell her a kid needed help when she could help, then she'd kill me."

Steve laughed slightly and nodded, "...Thanks."

Hopper nodded and stood up from the visitor chair in the room that he'd been sitting on. "I'm gonna go find a phone," he said as he walked towards the door to exit the exam room.



### 3. The Cabin

It was three-thirty in the afternoon by the time Steve was released from the hospital, which was two hours after they'd arrived.

The teen had been given a brace for his knee and a pair of crutches to help him get around on his own for the next week. Though he wasn't thrilled at the idea of not being able to walk for a week -- not to mention not being able to play basketball for at least another week after that -- he was relieved that it was just a bad sprain and he didn't break or tear anything.

The ride back to Hawkins felt even longer than the ride to the hospital, and Steve slumped into the passenger seat with a sigh, earning a slightly concerned look from Hopper, "You holding up okay, kid?"

"Yeah..." the boy said, but he couldn't hide the fact that he was in pain from the man looking at him. Jim didn't say a word about this, however, nodding in response before turning his eyes back to the road in front of him.

They were quiet for the rest of the ride, and when Hopper finally pulled up to the cabin that was his and El's home, Steve looked at him with confusion. The teen had expected that the police chief would drop him off at his own home, not bring him here. Hopper gave Steve a slightly amused smile before getting out of the truck.

It took them a few minutes to get to the cabin, even though they were parked right outside of it, as Steve wasn't yet used to relying on crutches to get around. He nearly fell a couple times, getting his crutches stuck in the snow, and Hopper steadied him each time.

Finally they reached the front door and the police chief proceeded to use the knock that let El know it was safe to open the door.

After a couple moments, the door opened to reveal a curly-haired girl, who immediately noticed the injured boy behind Hopper. "...Hurt," she said quietly, a little worry in her voice. Steve gave her a tired smile, "Yeah, little bit." The girl smiled back slightly and stepped

aside to let her friend and guardian into the cabin.

The moment the boy crossed the threshold of the doorway, he was bombarded by another young girl running up and hugging him tightly, nearly knocking him over. It was Max, and this surprised Steve for two reasons. One was that he hadn't expected Max to be there, and two was that Max wasn't much of a touchy-feely person, and she wasn't generally a fan of hugging.

Steve steadied himself and then wrapped an arm around her. "Hey," he said, "It's okay. It's just a sprain; I'll live."

"It was Billy, wasn't it?"

Steve sighed, "Max--"

--Was it Billy?"

"...Yes."

At this, the girl let go of the teen, anger clear in her expression. "I told him to leave all of us alone!" she said, looking around the room at the other kids -- Steve hadn't noticed them until this point. "I threatened him with that bat! I thought--"

"Max," Steve said gently, "it's not your fault. He's just an asshole -- *you're* not."

"...This isn't the first time he's hurt you since the night of the Demodogs, is it?"

Steve sighed again. He understood the girl's anger, but he was tired and in pain, and all he wanted was sit down and talk about anything other than Billy Hargrove. "Max..."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because you said he was leaving you alone. I don't care if he takes it out on me if he's not bothering you."

Max stared at the boy who had become like a real older brother to her over the past few months, not sure what to say. She wasn't used

to someone caring about her enough to protect her like this.

Thankfully Joyce used this moment to walk over to the two and interrupt the awkward silence. Steve looked at her with confusion not having noticed she was there when he'd walked into and briefly wondered if she'd been there the whole time.

"Alright, you need to sit down," she said, gently leading the teenager over to the sofa -- Dustin, Will, and Mike standing up to allow Steve to sit down. The mother took the crutches from the teen once he was sitting down, handing them to Hopper who placed them against the wall. "I'm gonna get you some ice," she said, patting the boy lightly on the shoulder before walking to the kitchen.

Meanwhile Lucas had gone to Max and lead her into El's bedroom. "He didn't tell me!" Max was yelling as Lucas sat down on El's bed while Max paced back and fourth in front of him. The boy sighed, "He wanted to protect you."

"I thought I had the upper hand with Billy! I should've done it. I should've beat him with that bat."

"You *did* scare him, though."

"Not enough! If I scared him more then Steve wouldn't be hurt--*again*."

"You can't control what your stepbrother does. It's not your fault."

"I could've taken some of it if I'd known, though." She sat down next to Lucas, and the boy could see that she had tears in her eyes now. He took her hand, giving it a reassuring squeeze, and she suddenly turned and hugged him tightly, burying her face in his shoulder.

Lucas hated that Max blamed herself for the things her stepbrother did, and that she was always worried that she'd turn out like him. No matter how much he tried to reassure her, Lucas knew that he couldn't make her believe that she was a good person, and that bothered him. "It's not your fault," the boy said softly, "And you're *not* like him."

The rest of the group was still in the living room, Mike, Dustin, Will,

and El gathered around Steve, who had managed to get his leg up on the couch and now had a bag of frozen vegetables -- courtesy of Mrs. Byers -- resting on his injured knee.

"What happened?" Will asked.

"Was it awesome?" said Dustin, "Did you kick his ass?"

Steve gave Dustin a bemused look, "Do I *look* like I kicked his ass?"

"Okay, fair enough," Dustin said, and Steve smiled a little.

"No," the teenager said, "It wasn't anything cool. He just did an illegal play in basketball practice."

This earned confused looks from all the kids, and Steve sighed, remembering that he was talking to a group of nerds. "He pushed me over and I fell wrong," Steve tried again, and the kids nodded in understanding.

Joyce and Hopper were sitting at the kitchen table, talking quietly, and Steve could hear his name a couple times, but he couldn't make out what they were saying about him.

Eventually Max and Lucas rejoined the group, and it became immediately obvious to everyone that Max had been crying.

## 4. Confrontation and Comfort

**Author's Note:** I just wanted to quickly say thank you to everyone who's been giving me such awesome feedback in the reviews! I'm so happy you're all enjoying this fic! Nothing makes an fanfic author happier than comments from readers who are enjoying the fic, so thank you all so much! Now without further ado, here is chapter four!

The redhead didn't say a word, she simply sat down on the floor in front of the couch, bringing her knees to her chest as she looked up at the injured teenager on the sofa.

Steve looked down at her, noticing her red eyes and tear stained cheeks, and sighed. Max blamed herself for her stepbrother's behavior, and Steve couldn't stand it. She was a good kid, and she didn't deserve the abuse she got from someone who was supposed to protect her, and she certainly shouldn't feel responsible for the abuse Steve experienced at Billy's hands.

The teen reached out and tussled the girl's hair. "Hey," he said gently, "Listen," Max looked up at him with wide vulnerable eyes. "It's not your fault your stepbrother's an asshole, okay?"

"...You should've told me what he was doing."

"I know. ...I'm sorry. I just didn't want you to go back to taking his shit just because he started taking it out on me."

"I wouldn't have..."

Steve raised a disbelieving eyebrow, making Max smile slightly in spite of herself. She stood up and hugged Steve tightly again. "Next time, kick his ass," she whispered, making him laugh a little. "Okay," he said with a smile, hugging back the girl who had so quickly become a little sister to him.

Hopper and Joyce had watched this scene unfold from their spot at the kitchen table, and they exchanged a look that clearly said they wanted to kill that Hargrove boy.

The police chief stood up and Joyce followed suite, placing a hand on his arm. "Hop..." she said softly, but Jim just shook his head and started for the door.

Eleven noticed this and gave the man a look of concern and confusion. "Where are you going?" she asked, and the others turned to look at him questioningly as well. "There's something I need to do," Hopper said, "I'll be back soon."

The kids all nodded in response, except for Max and Steve who exchanged a look with each other and then looked back at the policeman, both having guessed what Hopper was going out to do.

Jim got in his truck and drove into town to where Max lived. It was five in the afternoon, so chances were Billy would be home by now.

He'd never liked the kid, but like Max, Hopper believed that since Max threatened Billy with that nail-riddled bat after she drugged him, that he'd be leaving those kids alone, so he hadn't gotten involved for fear of making things worse or starting them up again.

Of course, now that he knew that Hargrove kid was still causing problems, all bets were off. Jim might not be able to arrest him, but he could certainly put the fear of god into the kid, and that was exactly what he was going to do.

The police chief pulled up in front of the house and got out of his truck. He walked up to the front door and rang the doorbell. No answer. Knowing that there was someone home due to the obnoxiously loud rock music coming from inside, he knocked on the door -- loudly and repeatedly -- until it swung open violently, revealing a tall teenager with long, greasy, blond hair.

"Can I *help* you?" Billy said in an irritated tone.

"Yeah, you can help me," Hopper said, "We need to talk." The policeman walked into the house, and surprisingly the teenager didn't attempt to stop him.

"Here's what you're going to do," Jim said to Billy once they were standing face to face in the living room, "You're going to stop

harassing Steve Harrington--"

--Or what? You gonna sit us down to talk out our differences like school-girls?"

The man smiled a little, though it was tense and sarcastic. "You think you're pretty funny, don't you, kid?" he said, "No, I'm not going to make you two work things out. If you don't stop harassing that boy, I'm going to come here and arrest you. The same goes for if you don't leave your sister and the rest of her friends alone. Do you understand me?"

The teenager averted his eyes from the man for a moment, evidently nervous, and Hopper nodded, "Good."

The policeman walked out of the house and back to his truck, hearing things being angrily broken from within the house. Good, he thought, that meant his message had gotten through.

Meanwhile at the cabin, the kids had all finally calmed down, now sitting on the floor playing that weird-ass medieval game that Steve hadn't even attempted to understand. Max was the only one not playing, sitting on the edge of the couch, careful to avoid the boy's injured leg.

She still felt guilty despite everyone trying to reassure her that it wasn't her fault. She occasionally looked at the teenager, seeing a pained expression on his face whenever he thought no one was looking.

Joyce noticed the way Max continually looked at the eighteen-year-old who had seemed to become a true brother to her, and sighed. The mother stood up and walked over to the sofa, placing a hand on the girl's shoulder. "Hey," she said gently, giving her a small smile, "can I talk to you for a minute?"

Max nodded and stood up, walking around the couch to meet Joyce on the other side of it.

Steve gave the woman a questioning look, and she smiled giving him a look that clearly stated "Let me take care of this," to which he

nodded in response.

Joyce lead Max over to the kitchen table, sitting down across from her. "Listen to me," she said gently, "I know how you feel. ...My ex-husband, Lonnie, was a lot like your stepbrother. He treated me and my boys horribly, and for a long time there was nothing I could do to get us away from him."

Max was staring at the woman sitting across from her with wide, attentive eyes. Everyone always tried to convince her that the things her stepbrother did weren't her fault, but no one seemed to really understand how she felt until now.

"I was always terrified that after spending so many years with him, I'd end up like him," Joyce continued, "That I would be a terrible mother and ruin my boys' lives. I blamed myself for everything Lonnie did, even though I couldn't have stopped him. ...But once we were divorced and I could protect Will and Jonathan on my own, I realized I wasn't like him. I still loved my boys as much as I did on the days they were born, and I would never do anything to hurt them. ...And it's the same for you. You care about your friends. You wouldn't do anything to hurt them, would you?"

Max shook her head in reply and Joyce smiled. "Then you're not going to end up like your stepbrother. I know how hard it is right now, having to live with him and see him every day. But I promise you, that does *not* mean you're going to be like him. You can't control him; but you're in charge of yourself, and you can choose not to be like him."

"...Really?" the girl asked and Joyce nodded. "Really," she said, "And if it's ever too much, my door's always open for you. Whenever it gets too bad, I want you to call me, and I will come and get you wherever you are. Even if it's the middle of the night. Okay?"

Max smiled a little, tears in her eyes, and nodded. "Thank you," she said in a voice so soft Joyce could hardly hear it. "You're going to be alright," the woman said with a gentle smile, placing a reassuring hand on top of one of Max's "I promise."



## 5. Family?

**Author's Note:** Here is the last chapter! Thank you all for the wonderful comments and for all the favourites and follows! I'm so glad you all enjoyed this story!

**Until the next fic!**

**-LizzySong**

Max told Joyce everything after that finally feeling like she had an adult she could trust.

The mother listened intently, occasionally giving the girl words of encouragement or interjecting with a question. She realized how much the child had gone through in such a short amount time, and she commended the girl's strength, though all she wanted to do was protect her.

This went on for some time, Max getting everything off her chest that she'd kept inside for so long and Joyce listening and being as supportive as she could, until Hopper knocked on the door and El let him in.

Joyce, Max, and Steve looked at the man, expecting to see evidence of some sort of fight, and were both relieved and confused to find nothing.

"...What'd you do?" Steve asked after a moment, but the policeman just shook his head slightly. "You just tell me if that kid does anything to you again, alright? --That goes for all of you," he said, looking around the room at all of the kids, who all nodded.

Steve sighed and began to stand up slowly, earning a "Where do you think you're going?" from Hopper.

"...We're not leaving?" Steve asked, in confusion The police chief shook his head, "No. You're gonna spend the night here, where I can keep an eye on you."

"But you've already done so much. I don't wanna--"

"--It's fine. Now sit back down before you fall on your face and I need to take you back to the hospital."

This earned a small smile from the teen as he did what was asked of him and sat down. "...Thanks. ...For everything," Steve said, looking up at Hopper.

"You're welcome, kid," came the reply, the man's voice slightly less gruff than it normally was.

Max turned back to Joyce at this point, anxiety clear in her eyes. "...Can I..." she swallowed and started again, "...Can I... stay with you tonight...?"

The mother smiled warmly and nodded, "Of course you can, sweetheart."

Max returned the smile and then lowered her eyes in slight embarrassment, not used to being so vulnerable about her feelings with an adult... or really anyone who wasn't Lucas. "Thanks..." she said quietly.

Hopper insisted on feeding all the kids before Joyce took them to their respective homes (except of course for Max who would stay with her and Will), and heated up seven TV dinners in the oven, seeing as that was all he had, as that was what he and Eleven mostly lived on.

The kids all pretended not to be disgusted by the so-called food, though El and Steve made faces at each other whenever Hopper wasn't looking to express their displeasure, and Max nearly gagged on her's at first.

By the time Joyce left with everyone except Steve and El, it was seven o'clock, which, Steve thought, wasn't late enough to warrant the exhaustion he was feeling; but after all, it *had* been a long day.

He sighed, practically melting into the couch, finally allowing himself to actually relax. Eleven sat down next to the teen, careful not to touch his injured leg, though she was staring at the brace on his knee.

Steve gave her a tired smile and she met his gaze, "...What's it do?"

she asked, pointing at the brace.

"It keeps my knee mostly straight so that it doesn't give out if I put weight on it," Steve said. El tilted her head in confusion, not fully understanding the explanation she'd been given. The teenager thought for a moment and then spoke again, trying a different, simpler approach, "It keeps my knee from moving too much so it can heal."

El nodded in understanding and Steve smiled again. "...You wanna try it on?" he asked, and the girl's eyes lit up, "Can I?"

"Yeah, sure you can." The boy leaned forward and took the brace off of his leg and El stretched out her leg so he could put the brace on her knee.

She tried to walk around with it, and Steve couldn't help but laugh a little. The brace was too large for her leg, and she nearly fell a couple times when she was trying to see how fast she could walk with it. She went over to Hopper, who was sitting at the table, and showed him.

The teenager watched her with a smile, surprised by how easily entertained the girl could be. But, he supposed after everything she'd gone through in her young life, she had to find comfort and joy in little things. No matter how strange those things might be.

Eventually El decided to go to bed, hugging Steve and then dragging Hopper to her room to tuck her in. It was times like this that Steve almost forgot that the kid was so powerful she could kill a room full of people with her mind -- because she was still a kid, after all. Even after everything she'd experienced, she still needed her dad to tuck her in at night.

Of course, Hopper wasn't technically El's father, Steve knew this, but he was the closest thing the girl had to one. And he was a damn good father.

After a few minutes Jim came back into the living room, closing the door to El's room behind him. He then addressed the boy lying on the sofa. "You gonna be okay on there for the night?" he asked, nodding his head to indicate he was referring to the couch.

"Yeah," Steve said, "I'll be fine." And Hopper nodded once more in confirmation before leaving the room.

The next week was surprisingly calm for both Steve and Max. Billy hadn't so much as looked at Steve, and Max informed the Party, Joyce, Steve and Hopper that her stepbrother had been continuing his streak of indifference toward her.

...Of course, she knew this wouldn't last forever, but knowing that she had the support of people who cared about her provided a source of strength and comfort she hadn't felt since her mother had married her stepfather.

When Steve drove her to school the next week -- his knee finally healed enough for him to drive without pain -- Max spoke softly, looking out the window so she didn't have to look at the boy who was driving. "...Thanks... For driving me to school and stuff..."

Steve smiled a little and shrugged, looking at her for a moment before turning back to the road, "What are brothers for?"

Max's eyes widened in surprise. She'd thought of Steve as her brother ever since that night three months ago, but she hadn't dared to think he'd consider her his sister. She leaned over and hugged him -- a little awkwardly due to the fact that he was driving -- which made him swerve the car a little.

"...Can we wait till we get to school to hug?" he asked, trying to keep the car from swerving off the road. Max let go of him and leaned back in her seat again. "Why?" she asked, "Is driving still too hard with your knee? 'Cause I can drive if you need me to."

"No!" Steve said, looking at her and pointing an authoritative finger at her before turning back to the road again, "Stop suggesting that." The girl smiled and rolled her eyes, holding her hands up in defeat. "You are not driving this car until I know you're not going to get us killed."

"How are you gonna know if you never let me practice?"

They went on like this for the rest of the drive, both feeling a sense of

comfort and normalcy as they argued the way normal siblings did. Things in Hawkins weren't always simple or easy, but at least this was one thing they could both count on to never be too confusing among the aliens and government conspiracies that surrounded them.

I